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ABSTRACT

Suggesting that too often initiatives have been placed in schools without attention to the implementation process, this paper discusses a model used in a professional development program for teachers of beginning reading and then describes and documents how each feature of the model was addressed through development and implementation work. The paper does not specifically address the effects of this program on students and teachers, although evaluation data are used in describing the various features of the model. It begins by discussing the initiative, its funding source, and the context in which the initiative took place. The paper explains that the LEADERS (Literacy Project) is a 3-year multi-site effort funded by Eisenhower Grant and involving three universities and a large number of school districts across Pennsylvania. It states that what is important is what has been learned about the various dimensions of the initiative and their importance in the success of the endeavor. It notes that the plan for other papers is to address more comprehensively the effects of the initiative on teachers and students. (Contains 19 references.) (NKA)

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Tinkering or Transforming: A New Paradigm for Professional Development for Teachers of Beginning Reading

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Tinkering or Transforming: A New Paradigm for Professional Development for Teachers of Beginning Reading

Recent concern about the numbers of struggling and poor readers has challenged schools and teachers to commit to the attainment of high standards for ALL students. Such a challenge requires teachers to be knowledgeable about what students need to know and be able to do in order to become successful readers. Teachers will need to know more "about their students, their subject matter, and the context of their work" (Lieberman & Miller, 2000). This challenge has also led to an increased emphasis on professional development for educators responsible for teaching reading. Much of this emphasis has been focused on the early grades, given research that supports early intervention (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). According to Snow, et al. (1998), teachers need support and guidance throughout their careers in order to maintain and update their knowledge and instructional skills. The Report from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) calls for stable, high-quality sources of professional development. This Report also calls for professional development that is long-term and systematic, one that moves beyond the "flavor of the month" workshop approach.

For too long, professional development has been the wasteland of education (Little, 1993). Teachers have been introduced to, and sometimes bombarded with, information about new projects or activities that happen to be in "vogue" at the time, often before the innovation has been subjected to solid research about its effectiveness. Too often initiatives have been placed in schools without attention to the implementation process. Fullan (1991) talks about the "implementation dip", or initial difficulty with implementation, when teachers are introduced to ideas that may not be part of their repertoire. According to Joyce and Showers (1995), creating

change in schools requires, "an extensive and potent staff development system, one far more powerful and pervasive than the one that exists..." (p. 5).

Such a professional development program needs to build upon what has been learned from the past (Lieberman & Miller, 2000) and break from traditional forms. In other words, we must consider a new paradigm for professional development, one that promotes the transformation of teacher practices, rather than a model where teachers are introduced to various strategies and practices and asked to somehow fit those strategies into their current teaching practices. Work done by Ball and Cohen, (1999); Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, (1995); Little, (1993); Loucks-Horsley, 1995; and Stein, Smith, and Silver, (2000) provide much useful information about professional development. They support professional development programs that include long term work with teachers in which there is collaboration among staff and opportunity for teachers to analyze and reflect on their own teaching practices.

The standards of the National Staff Development Council (2001) call for attention to content, context, and process issues. Further, professional development efforts should build the leadership capacity of individuals and the collective faculty in the school to ensure the success of any change effort. This is especially true in the area of beginning literacy, given the importance of early reading success as a means of enhancing student performance in later grades. However, according to the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000), there are "significant gaps in our knowledge of teacher education and development across the board" (p. 5-14).

The purpose of this paper is to discuss a model used in a professional development program for teachers of beginning reading and then to describe and document how we addressed each feature of the model in our work. In this paper, we do not specifically address the effects of this program on students and teachers, although we use evaluation data in describing the various

features of the model. We begin by discussing the initiative, its funding source, and the context in which the initiative took place.

LEADERS: The Initiative

The LEADERS (Literacy Project) is a three year-multi site effort funded by Eisenhower Grant. The project involves three universities and a large numbers of school districts across Pennsylvania. The acronym, LEADERS (Literacy Educators Assessing and Developing Early Reading Success) was selected by project directors and staff at the first joint planning meeting. The Eisenhower funds require the project to focus on improving the instructional practices of primary reading teachers (Kdg.-3), to improve their knowledge and understanding of literacy content, and to improve the literacy performance of students participating in project classrooms. The project directors from the participating universities decided that another focus would be to enhance the likelihood that participating teachers would become leaders in their schools, that is, they would be willing to work, not only with the children in their own classrooms, but with other adults to improve the overall performance of students in that school.

Each university or college was required to recruit teachers from schools in which there were large numbers of students from high-poverty background or where there was a large percentage of low performing students. In this paper, we discuss the initiative at the lead site, using data from the second year of the project, given that we made several changes from Year 1 in how we functioned, based upon what we learned from the participating sites and from teachers.

The Site. We worked in a large urban district with 6 different elementary schools, each qualifying for participation because of large numbers of students identified as high poverty (all

schools with 75% or more students qualifying for free or reduced lunch) or having large numbers of students with low achievement test scores. Only one of the six schools was new to the project; all others had participated during the first year and had chosen to send a new cohort group of teachers for the second year.

Teachers. During the second year, we worked with 23 teachers. All but one teacher was female; 16 were Caucasian and 7 were African American. Experience levels ranged from 2 years to 30 years, with a mean of 8.3 years of teaching experience. There were three kindergarten teachers, two first grade teachers, six second grade teachers, and nine third grade teachers; the other three teachers included a learning support teacher, one who taught a grade 2/3 split, and one teacher who taught fourth grade (was assigned to first grade at the beginning of the year and then reassigned; she asked to continue with the project).

The Professional Development Model

The model for LEADERS was developed over time as we strived to provide an intensive, long-term professional development experience that would do more than just add a few strategies to the repertories of teachers (See Figure 1). We, indeed, wanted to work with teachers in ways that they would not only become more knowledgeable about how to teach reading, but would become more reflective about their work. One of our goals was to enhance the abilities of teachers to work outside their classrooms and to make a difference in the schools as a whole. Our model addresses the three dimensions -- Content, Context, and Processes -- recommended in the National Staff Development Council Standards (2001). We provide a brief description of each of these below and then describe specifically how we addressed each of these dimensions in a later section.

Content. There is great concern today about teachers' knowledge and understanding of literacy acquisition and instruction. According to Moats (1999), teachers need to have a deep understanding of reading instruction. She says "Without deeper knowledge, the specific techniques of lesson delivery cannot be acquired, let alone knowledge of language, reading psychology, children's literature, or the management of a reading program based on assessment" (p. 11). And, Ball (1991) indicates that teachers often have to work with their discipline as learners themselves, before they understand how to teach it. From the beginning, we were determined that the literacy content presented in LEADERS would be research-based and would reflect what is known about individual differences and how students learn. In addition, we believed that teachers needed knowledge about areas related to reading assessment, classroom climate, and outside resources, including parents and community.

Context. Any effort to effect change in the schools must take into consideration the unique context—including student demographics, faculty and administrative differences, curriculum in use, and even the cultural ethos of the building. Given that we were working in more than one school, it was even more imperative that LEADERS staff be well versed in the importance of working within the school. One of the important considerations, of course, is that teachers recognize the relevance of the initiative. Further, LEADERS, coming from outside the district, had to be aligned with the goals and strategies being promoted by the district (as well as compatible with state standards and requirements).

Processes. In designing LEADERS, three key processes were built into the initiative. First, there would be intensive and on-going systematic support, both material and human. Not only would teachers receive professional and classroom materials that would enhance their professional knowledge, but support from a resource teacher assigned to each school to work

directly with teachers was an integral part of the project. One of the important roles of the resource teacher was to serve as a colleague who could assist teachers in thinking about their practices. As suggested by Stigler, teachers need to learn to analyze practice, both their own and others (Willis, 2002).

Second, given the importance of data as a means of instructional decision making, we asked teachers to administer various literacy tasks that give them a better picture of their students' strengths and needs. Thus, we used assessment data as a process for helping teachers think about their students and whether their classroom practices were meeting the needs of those students. The results of these measures were also used as a basis for what we called a focus project, asking teachers to design a project that would improve their students' literacy performance. We also asked teachers to describe what they learned as they completed this year-long project.

Third, during the entire year, we strived to develop communities of learners; e.g., teachers at each of the schools, the entire cohort group of 23 teachers and the University staff working with the project, and the learners in the classroom. We recognized the power of learning from each other, of collaborating, and creating environments where each individual had opportunities to suggest ideas and thoughts to others and to learn from each other.

The communities of learning established in this initiative reflect to a great degree the notion described in the work of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993); that is, important knowledge about teaching is generated both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers can make many contributions to knowledge about how students learn to read and what works; such work can inform university faculty involved in such efforts. Working together as a community of learners enhances knowledge development and the application of this knowledge to practice.

In the following section, we describe LEADERS and document how each dimension in the model was implemented in the project.

Leaders Initiative

Content. The content of the LEADERS initiative addressed four primary areas: comprehensive framework for beginning reading; use of assessment; importance of classroom climate; and use of parent and community resources. Basic notions about literacy that provide a framework for the initiative include the following: (1) students need opportunities to hear and to read quality children's literature; (2) sequential and systematic skill development is an essential part of the beginning reading program; (3) comprehension is an essential component and outcome in beginning reading; (4) students need opportunities to write as a means of improving their reading performance; and (5) students must be motivated to read and write.

We strongly believed that data about students would enable teachers to develop instruction that would be more appropriate for their students. Such data would also enable teachers to become more knowledgeable about the reading and writing process and in that way enhance their instructional practice. Data sources were informal, performance or skill measures that helped teachers to become more observant as they taught.

Effective literacy instruction can occur only in classrooms where there is attention to all students and their needs, and where the teachers help students learn to respect each other and work as a group. In this initiative, we used the Responsive Classroom's Morning Meeting Model (Kriete,1999) as our framework for establishing a positive classroom climate. Teachers were very receptive to this model, believing that it not only helped students gain respect for each other, but enhanced their listening and speaking skills. Indeed, one of the schools chose to

implement the entire Responsive Classroom Framework throughout the entire school, given the strong positive reaction of teachers from the LEADERS project.

Throughout the year, we emphasized the importance of involving parents and using community resources as a means of enhancing the literacy performance of students. Participants were given opportunities to describe what they were doing and to identify ways that they involved parents.

We presented content in a variety of ways, from more traditional workshop settings to providing materials to teachers to read (print and computer) to sessions with individual teachers at the schools. Presentations included a discussion of the theory and research underlying the various strategies. We used as our text the series of articles, Every Child a Reader: Applying Reading Research in the Classroom (CIERA, 1998). We also gave teachers other articles about the topic that was to be discussed and asked them to think about the article and its implications for instruction. Teachers also worked with various state documents and materials as a means of relating what they were doing in their classrooms to state standards.

As part of the initiative, we administered a baseline and final test to teachers that assessed their knowledge of literacy. The test included three parts: multiple-choice, short answer and essay for a total of 50 points. Scores of teachers reflected an increase in knowledge; mean score on the baseline test was 29.0 and on the post test, 36.0. In addition, teachers in focus groups and in questionnaires completed throughout the year were able to tell us what they learned. Some examples follow:

> A long time ago, I used to clump reading all together, not thinking phonics and phonemic awareness were two different things, just thinking whole word was the way to teach, not realizing that you had to teach parts of words and then whole.

> What makes LEADERS so powerful is that it is based in reading research. It is not just another little project to do. It allows teachers to be researchers and professionals. It allows them to take the teaching profession seriously.

Teachers on a final self-report questionnaire indicated major changes in classroom instruction in the following areas: phonics (use of various research-based strategies); fluency activities; more opportunities for writing; use of morning meeting activities; and attention to assessment results. Teachers also indicated that they observed the following changes in students: improved accuracy and fluency, stronger phonics and phonemic awareness levels, and more excited and positive about reading and writing.

Context. Although all schools were in the same large urban district, there were differences in these schools, from leadership style and administrative support to instructional requirements. For example, in one school every teacher had to use learning centers every day. Given our awareness of the importance of context, the constraints and barriers that might prohibit full implementation of the initiative, much work was done to (a) become familiar with the context; and (b) work with administrators and teachers so that there was an accurate understanding of LEADERS. First, there was a procedure for working with the principals of the participating schools. These administrators received notices of all meetings and copies of handouts and agendas; we met with them individually (formally and informally). We also met with the principals as a group to discuss plans, raise questions, and solicit suggestions. They were extremely helpful, suggesting ways that we could weave our way through bureaucratic levels, and helping us think of ways that we could implement our ideas.

Secondly, we worked diligently to incorporate literacy practices and suggestions that were congruent with district policy and with our beliefs. For example, we were able to use the district's standards in discussing what students needed to know and be able to do at various grade

levels. Also, the district was promoting specific decoding techniques and we were able to assist teachers in becoming more familiar with these.

Process. In the following sections, we discuss on-going support, assessment to guide instruction, and community of learners.

Providing Intensive, On-Going Systematic Support. Much technical support was provided in this initiative. Funds were made available for teachers to acquire children's literature books, professional texts, and motivational materials. A membership in the International Reading Association was purchased for each teacher. At the end of the year, teachers were very positive about these resources, indicating their importance to their professional growth. It was fascinating to see teachers at the Saturday workshops with their copies of The Reading Teacher, ready to discuss a specific article!

One of the key means of support was a resource teacher assigned to each school. As mentioned previously, Fullan (1991) talks about the "implementation dip" and indicates that we need to be more attentive to how teachers implement what they are learning. In other words, there is often a great discrepancy between what is presented, and how it is perceived and then taught in the classrooms. Having a resource person at each school enabled us to provide ongoing support. Although we believed that such "coaching" was important, during the first year, we moved slowly, using several approaches. For example, while the resource person was often in the classroom assessing students, there were opportunities to work informally, asking questions about classroom practices and procedures and making suggestions about different ways to address instructional issues. In one school, we observed a first grade teacher conducting learning centers with her students. It was easy to talk with the teacher about why she was doing this, what her management procedures were, and to help her think of ways to prepare students to

function independently. In another example, teachers often asked for demonstration lessons, which permitted the resource person to demonstrate how a particular strategy could be implemented with the entire class or a small group. This often led to the teacher making changes in how she was instructing students. As one teacher said, "You talked so softly and yet my children listened to you. I told them I'm going to use Mrs. XXX voice today.!"

In the second year, we were much more specific about how these resource persons should function. Although their primary role was to help the teacher based upon the teacher's needs, all resource persons were asked to observe formally and provide feedback to teachers at least twice during the year. We believe that these observations enabled us to be more systematic in providing feedback needed by teachers to make improvements in how they were implementing various strategies or approaches.

Teachers were very positive about the support that they received, especially the work of the resource teacher. Given that we were not there in the role of evaluators, teachers felt comfortable sharing some of their needs and working with the resource teachers in implementing various strategies. One teacher, for example, stated:

> I think the resource teacher's presence here adds to the project the fact that there is a connection. She is in our classrooms and we go back and talk about what we are doing. Oh, if we want to try something, she is here to help us. It is the resource (that is important) not just the ideas.

Using Assessment Data to Guide Instructional Precision Making. Although assessment tasks and tests are administered in classrooms across this country, the complaint, often is that the results of these assessments are not used in a meaningful way to guide instruction. One of the goals of this project was to develop an assessment battery that could be used, not only as a means of evaluating the program, but also to provide a means for teachers to become knowledgeable about what their students know and are able to do in the area of literacy, and to use that

knowledge to make decisions about instruction. The assessment measures also seemed to help students learn how to take tests; as one teacher indicated:

> When I gave the SAT 9 last year, I had kids who were so frustrated, even though we practiced the format and everything. I had kids who were frustrated, who would not even open the book. They shut down. This year, they were so relaxed and at ease.

Prior to Year 1 of the initiative, project staff developed a Literacy Assessment Battery (LAB) with a series of tasks that could be used by teachers at each grade level (K-3) for initial and post testing. This battery, after the first year, was revised by teachers who had used it. After the second year, we made revisions again based upon teacher feedback. The LAB consists of tasks in the following literacy areas: concepts about print, phonemic awareness, phonics (pseudowords), fluency, comprehension (retelling and questioning), writing, and attitude towards reading and writing.

Teachers were taught to administer the tasks. Throughout the year, they discussed the results at the workshops, looking at students' work, and focusing on student strengths and needs. More importantly, they talked about how to design instruction that would enhance students' literacy performance. To help teachers learn to use the measures, and to provide assistance in administration, the resource teacher assisted in the administration of the tasks. (This role for the resource teacher enabled each of them to (a) become more familiar with the students in the school; (b) gain credibility with the teacher; and (c) provide a starting place for a discussion about instruction in each classroom.

In the second year at this site, we decided that we would ask teachers to use the assessment results to decide upon what we called a "focus" project. In other words, they would decide in which area of literacy most students were weak, plan instruction that would develop the abilities of students, and be prepared to share the results of their efforts during a Day of

Celebration near the end of the year. Teachers prepared a poster on which they displayed (a) ideas that they implemented, (b) results of their students, using tasks from the LAB or other tasks that they developed, and (c) a summary of what they learned by doing the project.

The impact of this focus or action research project was much greater than we had anticipated. Many teachers went beyond using what they were learning in the workshops or meetings that we held. They used the internet or the library to identify resources, talked with each other to discuss how to plan the project, and developed ideas of their own to implement this project. One teacher, who decided to work with fluency, found a set of rubrics that she used both for teaching her students about fluency and for assessing students' work. She also taught students how to evaluate the work of their peers in a positive way. "You read nice and smooth. I like listening to you, "was the response of one child to the reading of another.

Perhaps the words of one of our teachers, summarizes what this project meant to her.

> Until the age of 26, I was very shy around large groups of people. When I became a teacher I was determined to have every child in my room feel comfortable enough to speak freely. I have focused on oral language throughout my entire career, but this year I was able to accomplish much more with oral language due to many things I learned in the LEADERS program. I felt this was a very worthwhile focus for the year and in many instances the results of the project pleasantly surprised me!

Developing Communities of Learners. Given the literature that speaks to the importance of teachers as learners, we sought to develop a cohort group across the schools that met together on a regular basis for an extended period of time. Teachers participated in 72 hours of professional development activities. The initiative began with a five-day summer workshop followed by additional meetings and workshops during the year. Some of these meetings were on Saturdays or during a designated staff development day, and others occurred after school.

Strategies that were used to develop a sense of teacher as learner were (a) opportunities to network or share information; and (b) discussion of readings at the meetings.

The networking experience was very much valued by the teachers. Teachers frequently met in grade-alike groups to discuss what they had attempted in their classrooms since the last workshop. These were exciting, productive occasions and teachers often commented on how much they learned about what was going on in other schools in their own district or in the participating charter school. Often, there were major differences in available materials, or instructional or assessment requirements, that sparked debate among the teachers.

Teachers also valued the opportunity to meet in school groups. They indicated that they had very little time to interact at their own schools. There were times when meetings of teachers from specific schools were held at the large group workshops, but we also met in the schools on a regular basis where a University resource person met with teachers to discuss various instructional goals or needs of that particular school. Several teachers, in discussing their interaction with others at their schools, said:

> I have talked to Sue (learning support teacher) about our fluency project, and we have compared notes. I've been in Fran's classroom. She wants to do a team teaching lesson with me that we haven't actually planned specifically. More than anything, it is a support thing, a chance to vent. You know, having someone to understand. Come to this school; it was a wonderful way to come into this team. There is just a built-in sense of family.

> It is helpful to spend time with your colleagues from your school. There is no time to spend time with them. The cross-school sharing and the in-school sharing are especially beneficial.

During the first year, we also developed a private listserv for all members of the initiative (across the state), where teachers could share various ideas, raise questions, or just lurk! In the second year, we began the development of a website, where we provide a summary of various strategies that have been introduced in the initiative, answer frequently asked questions, and

provide links to other literacy websites. Technology became an important resource for enhancing the learning of teachers as well as resource for improving instructional practice.

As mentioned previously, we were also committed to encouraging teachers to become leaders in their schools as a means of sustaining project efforts and to promote teacher professional growth. Throughout the year, as we worked with teachers, we identified those whom we thought might be able to make presentations for future cohort groups. At the end of the first and second years, we held workshops that focused on leadership and coaching skills, since teachers who had completed the program were encouraged to continue their efforts during the following years.

As we continued in the initiative, we were able to involve more and more teachers as "experts." As mentioned above, teachers from year 1 helped revise the LAB. Several teachers from year 1 conducted workshops for year 2 cohort groups. They made presentations about phonemic awareness, decoding, writing, and fluency. Teachers also presented at state conferences. Also, we formed a Teacher Advisory Committee whose responsibility was to provide suggestions about how we can improve project implementation and sustain our efforts.

In one school where we had worked for two years, the teachers themselves decided to form a study group in which they would select articles or books to read and meet outside of the school to continue their professional discussions. In other schools, teachers have continued to use the assessment materials and strategies introduced in the initiative.

Lessons Learned

Although our primary goal in this paper was to describe the model underlying LEADERS, we believed that it was essential to look at each of the dimensions of the model and to describe the lessons learned during the evolution of the project. Based on responses of teacher

participants, observations in the classrooms, and reflections of the resource teachers during the past year, we identified what we have learned about each of the dimensions of our model.

Content.

1. The various elements in the literacy framework were (a) comprehensive and research-based and (b) aligned with the literacy initiatives of the district. Therefore, although we will continue to refine how we develop and present them, given new participants, we plan to continue with the basic framework as is.
2. The assessment battery served primarily as means for teachers to obtain initial information about their students, to learn more about the reading and writing processes, and as a final assessment measure. We are searching for ways to help teachers become even more competent in the use of on-going assessment data, including informal diagnostic lessons and observations.
3. The Morning Meeting (Kriete, 1999) has been enthusiastically accepted; teachers see the value of these activities in enabling students to work as a group and to develop oral language.

Context.

4. Given that the students in the schools come from high-poverty families and that literacy achievement overall is low, there is a need for careful, systematic, consistent instruction. At the same time, teachers must attend to the social and emotional needs of their students. The task is a complex one and as professional developers, we must be aware of the important and difficult task that teachers face.
5. The impact on teachers varied in degree, but in all cases, there was some level of impact, resulting in (a) an increase in knowledge, (b) changes in classroom practices, (c) changes in beliefs, or (d) connections between theory and practice (Swan, 2002).

6. Support by administrators at the district and school level were crucial to the success of the project.
7. In many of the schools, the cohort group worked together more often than in previous years. They were also able to influence their peers, e.g., to become a participant in the LEADERS initiative the following year or to use some of the suggested strategies and activities.

Processes

8. The role of the resource teacher was a critical element in enabling teachers to gain confidence in their use of the various strategies and in providing the support necessary for sustainability. At the same time, the ways in which the resource teachers functioned differed. We have many questions about this; perhaps the role should differ, given different needs of teachers. At the same time, what are the critical roles and behaviors necessary for one serving in this role?
9. The focus project proved to be a very important professional development activity. Teachers seemed to value the fact that they could select an area for study based on their own identification of need or interest. They responded by creating their own personal professional development plan.
10. Data collected from informal measures were useful to teachers in learning more about their students. Further, the results were the basis for much discussion between resource teachers and classroom teachers about instructional practices, given that resource teachers assisted in administering and interpreting the measures.
11. Teachers were acknowledged as "inside" experts" with information to share and stories to tell. This aspect of the project generated growth in all who participated.

12. The empowerment that occurred because of recognition that teachers received for their knowledge and accomplishments was evident in teachers' positive response to the project, including high attendance and participation at all meetings, and in their willingness to become leaders at their schools.

Summary

As mentioned previously, our primary goal in this paper was to discuss important elements of the model used in the development and implementation of this initiative. In other papers, we plan to address more comprehensively the effects of the initiative on teachers and students. However, as indicated in the documentation provided in describing the project, there has been an impact on teachers, from growth in knowledge of literacy and how to teach it to changes in teaching practices. There have also been attitudinal and affective changes which indicate that teachers are more excited about what they are doing and feel more empowered to make a difference for children. (Note: There has been significant growth in student achievement; but this will be addressed in another paper.)

What is as important is what we have learned about the various dimensions of the initiative and their importance in the success of the endeavor. We have not only learned a great deal about the importance of each of the features of our initiative, but we have learned about how they interact. Specifically, although the presentation of techniques or strategies in a workshop setting can provide some of the initial knowledge base, other features or elements are essential.

First, there is a need to build a community of learners who are working towards a common goal. The opportunity to learn from each other was often identified as a strength of LEADERS. Teachers talked about how they helped each other with the action research projects, in discussing the results of the assessment battery, and about the various strategies that they were

using. Thus, the notion of building a community of learners was an essential ingredient of this initiative. Even principals saw the results of this collaboration: "The bonding is stronger because of LEADERS. Teachers systematically plan lessons together by grade level and are more engaged in 'professional language' as they dialogue with their colleagues." When teachers could talk with each other about how to implement something, or about specific issues regarding instruction, there was a synergy that increased teacher enthusiasm and effort, at both the communal and personal levels.

Second, there is a need to provide on going support; in this project, the resource person from the University and each other! Teachers sought support from the resource teacher or their peers, or they, on their own, found journal articles or books that were useful to them. As one teacher explained, "Without someone to be there to help you – and remind you, the workshops would be just another set of things we go to." Resource teachers not only provided the "gentle nudges," but they assisted teachers in implementing strategies appropriately, gave demonstration lessons, and reassured them when they were experiencing some initial difficulties in this process.

Third, the support that is provided must be flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of the participants. Sometimes resource teachers were there to reaffirm or to listen, especially with some of the more experienced, confident teachers. In other cases, resource teachers needed to demonstrate or model various strategies, serving more as a mentor. This was especially true for some teachers with little experience who found themselves in situations where they were experiencing discipline or management problems. At times, especially with the focus projects, resource teachers functioned as experts, suggesting various materials to read and providing insights about classroom data results. In other words, resource teachers served as colleagues, as experts, or as "mirrors" for the various teachers.

Fourth, what was especially intriguing was the use of data as a means of helping teachers think about their classroom practice. As teachers reviewed the data with others, they became more aware of how to interpret and use the data for planning instruction for specific students, or groups of students.

Fifth, the comments and behavior of teachers lead us to another conclusion. Over and over, teachers indicated that they were treated as professionals who were expected to develop and implement instruction that was effective for the students they taught. The pride of teachers in their action research projects was very evident during the Day of Celebration when they talked enthusiastically and confidently about their work with other school personnel, University administrators and faculty, and preservice teachers. As one teacher stated, "What makes this project different is strategies that fellow colleagues have used, not something that we've seen on paper."

Finally, the initiative had to be flexible enough to adjust to the contextual aspects of each school, from the experience levels of teachers, to curricular and procedural requirements, to student needs and demographics. In summary, after two years, we believe that we have learned a great deal about the many elements that are critical in any professional development effort, and that in LEADERS we have a model that can be used as a starting point for those interested in working with teachers to improve the early literacy performance of students. At the same time, we know that we have much more to learn.

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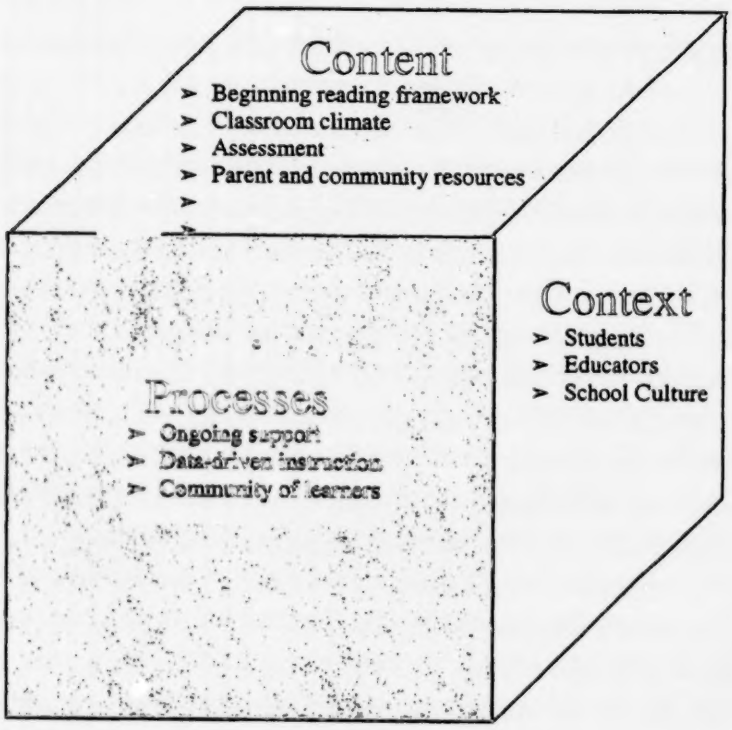

Figure 1. Model of LEADERS: A Professional Development Initiative

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